Department of Justice Canada | Ministère de la Justice Canada | Canada

opening statement by:

THE HONOURABLE ROBERT NICHOLSON, P.C., Q.C., M.P. for Niagara Falls, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

on the event of:

Announcement of Opening of the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime and Funding for Victims of Crime

Toronto, Ontario

March 16, 2007

Check against delivery

Introduction

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I am very pleased to be here today with Ministers Day and Flaherty and Senator LeBreton to help announce new and important measures for a very important group—victims of crime.

We know that when violent crimes occur, all of us feel the impact—not just the victims themselves, but their family, friends, neighbours and entire communities. The psychological and emotional burdens can be devastating.

And all too often, these people who have already endured so much pain and sadness must also work their way through a complicated justice system that up until now has not heard their pleas.

Our Government has been listening to and working with organizations such as the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, CAVEAT, the Canadian Association for Victim Assistance, and the Canadian Police Association about how we can make effective changes for Canada's victims. And I'm proud that, wherever they are, they are able to share in this event today.

Our Government is listening and responding to victims of crime. We understand how difficult their losses must be, and we have chosen to listen to them and to give them the respect they deserve.

Victims, and those who advocate for them, need to have a more effective voice in our justice system—a voice that has a greater impact than those of criminals.

Our Government has made tackling crime one of our priorities. We are committed to stronger laws that deal with gangs, guns and drugs, and to ensuring that our communities are safe from crime.

And part of that commitment is to better meet the needs of victims of crime in areas where the federal government is responsible .

Today, we are pleased to deliver on this commitment by providing $52 million in funding over the next four years to boost programs, services and funding for victims of crime. These measures will improve access to services and provide victims with a more effective voice in the criminal justice system.

Ombudsman

Part of the funding we are announcing today will go toward establishing the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

This office will be an independent resource for victims who have concerns about areas where the federal government is responsible—including the federal justice system and the corrections system.

The Ombudsman will, among other things,

- promote access to existing federal government programs and services for victims;
- review situations where the federal government does not comply with legislation or established policies; and
- identify and explore issues that impact on victims.

The person who will eventually be named Ombudsman will work at arm's length from the government, so that victims will be more confident that their views are being heard.

The Ombudsman will also work closely with the Department of Public Safety, complementing the work of the National Parole Board and the Correctional Service of Canada. Minister Day will speak more in a few moments about how the Ombudsman will benefit the work of the National Parole Board and the Correctional Service of Canada.

The Ombudsman will report annually directly to the Minister of Justice, but may make recommendations to the Minister of Justice or my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, at any time on specific issues.

I would also like to announce that our Government is now in the process of considering who will be appointed as the Ombudsman.

A notice will be placed in the *Canada Gazette*. In addition, a notice will be placed on the Privy Council Office Web site and candidates may apply directly to PCO. Those details will be made available later today.

This Government is committed to ensuring that victims have a stronger voice in the criminal justice system. Many other individuals and groups have an Ombudsman to turn to when they are in need. Victims expect and deserve no less.

Additional Victim Funding

The new funds that we're announcing today will also help the federal government and the provinces and territories respond to a variety of issues facing victims of crime— from first-response service delivery, to court-based services, to services for victims of offenders under federal jurisdiction.

For example, this funding will enhance a number of programs already offered by the Department of Justice, particularly the Victims Fund.

The Victims Fund provides financial assistance to victims that will allow them to travel to sentencing hearings to deliver victim impact statements. There is also financial assistance for support persons to travel with victims to National Parole Board Hearings.

In addition, we will increase funding for services to victims who live in areas where few services exist. This includes the three territories, which have much higher rates of victimization than the rest of Canada—and where I, as Attorney General, am responsible for prosecuting criminal offences.

There will also be a component of the Victims Fund that will provide limited emergency financial assistance for Canadians who become victims of serious violent crimes while abroad.

The funding will also provide additional new resources to the Department of Public Safety, to improve victim communications at the National Parole Board and strengthen victim services at Correctional Service Canada.

Addressing the needs of victims of crime in Canada is, of course, a shared responsibility among all levels of government. And in fact, the provinces and territories provide the front-line assistance to victims and assist victims to participate in criminal proceedings. They also administer the travel assistance portion of the Victims Fund.

Our Government intends to continue supporting the provinces and territories, as well as stakeholders, in their work.

Tackling Crime

Working together on behalf of victims is the right thing for this Government to do. But preventing other people from becoming victims is even better. That is why tackling crime is central to our Government's agenda.

Since taking office last year, we have brought forward no fewer than 11 new legislative proposals that will help reduce crime and create safer communities for Canadians. We have also brought into force Bill C-19, which creates new offences that specifically target street racing—a reckless and dangerous act that all too often kills. We also committed to supporting community-based programs that can provide youth at risk with positive opportunities and help them make good choices.

We have made some progress, but there are still nine bills in Parliament for which I am responsible as Minister of Justice, and which I am committed to bringing into force. These bills target criminals whose sentences are not strong enough, who are released early, who are repeat offenders, or who prey on our young people.

I am eager to do my part to move forward our Government's agenda on tackling crime, and to help ensure safe streets and secure communities—and fewer victims of crime.

Conclusion

By creating the office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime and by enhancing programs and services for victims, our Government is making significant progress in meeting the needs of victims of crime in matters of federal jurisdiction.

It represents another promise made and promise kept for Canadians.

Thank you. Now Minister Day will say a few words...

- 30 -

Date Modified: **2008-04-14**